News coverage, The Watergate Caper, JFK autopsy Harold Weisberg 8/20/72

I have seen only the Washington Post and aside from two TV talk shows and last night's TV news, have heard only the Post all-news radio station, so I haven't what can be taken as a fair sample of play. The Republicans, clearly, timed their announcement for the down-play that, predictably, they got.

This morning's Post had no mention of bugging at all. It did not report the MacGregor announcement that John Mitchell had investigated John Mitchell before Martha liberated him and had found himself as pure as she would like it. There was no mention of it in the hours and a half of "news" Its TV station has Saturday nights. The first is 30 mins local news, then 30 of the net's, then a syndicated show of its origin, Agronsky & Co (1st night without A, with Hugh Sidey in his chair), and even with Carl Rowan on the panel, there was no mention. He has been talking about it. Nobody even said it was a grim joke.

The Caper was mentioned on CBS's Face the Nation and an hour-long Meet the Press, but with the most professionally incompetent "questioning" that was like shilling for the Republican, Dole on CBS and MacGregor and Herb Klein on NBC.

The interesting thing is the obvious semantics, and even when the names were mentioned, all the trained reportorial selas knew the fish they were not to grab. The line is that nobody in "authority" had anything to do with this bad, bad,bad, stipid, stupid stupid thing. The names mentioned were those of Mitchell, Stans and Colson only. Not,for example, Hunt or Liddy, both of whom were in positions of authority. And somebody, if not Stans, quite obviously had enough "authority" to dispose of at least $114,000 in Republican cash without being charged with conversion, theft or anything else. There can't be a Washington reporter who doesn't know this official deception is precisely that and telegraphs the nature of the charges that obviously are about to be filed. So, nobody asked about Hunt of Liddy and a vast audience was told the Republicans are opposed to what they did, in a context that will persuade most viewers.

This morning for more than a half hour and this afternoon for at least an hour I listened to the radio. No mention of the Morgan story saying the Warren Commission is right because it was so grossly wrong. The Post's treatments was so diffident that the entire story, about six inches of rewrite, didn't even provide the info usually in the lead alone.

Son the Caper shows signs of getting the downplay, unless something happens to change it, and the JFK story got it,except that it got the kind of head and space that will reach opinion formers not in Miami. All the government people will have seen and been influenced by it. If these are fair samples, the treatments is about what we could have epxected. Outside of Washington, perhaps it was different. I'd like to see all local treatments of both stories when (unrushed) possible.

The flaws in both stories are obvious. No knowledge of either was required of any reporter, rewriteman or head writer. That none was pointed out is eloquent commentary. Unless there was virtual censorship, this beeing a weekend, I'd say the radio treatment indictes no or slight wire-service treatment. What radio did report is the TV shows, which merely magnified their influences adverse to truth and the abdications of the competent men supposedly questioning. It was quite unlike George Herman's representation in a long Potomac feature today. He said when he does get a responsive answer he repeats the question, rephrased, three times and if there is no response by the third the audience understands. Today neither he nor anyone else asked the right questions, so they were even less interested in the wrong answers and without concern about being used to feed lines to Dole, who answered questions they didn't ask to get his propaganda in- and out.